

Parramatta River Masterplan Public Exhibition Feedback Report March 2019



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to summarise and present key findings from the Parramatta River Catchment Group's (PRCG) online survey to gather community feedback on the Parramatta River Masterplan during its public exhibition. The Parramatta River Catchment Group, formed in 2008 is an alliance of Local and State Government agencies and the community, working together to make the Parramatta River swimmable again through the 'Our Living River' initiative. Following extensive technical studies and community stakeholder consultation, the PRCG developed the Parramatta River Masterplan which includes ten steps to achieving the vision of a swimmable river by 2025.

The draft Masterplan was put on public exhibition between 18 October and 29 November 2019 and was accompanied by an online survey. The draft Masterplan received seven formal submissions and 194 survey responses. All seven formal submissions were made by Councils in the Parramatta River Catchment.

The 19-question survey aimed to:

- understand attitudes towards the river and swimming in the river;
- sense check support and gather feedback on the ten steps and Masterplan; and
- understand behaviours that community might adopt to help achieve the vision.

The survey was hosted on the 'Our Living River' website and Sydney Water Talk website and was accompanied by a short video introducing the Masterplan. The Masterplan was promoted through the 'Our Living River' newsletter, Facebook and Twitter, Burwood, Canada Bay, Hunters Hill, Inner West and City of Parramatta websites and social media pages.

The 194 responses were very supportive of the Masterplan, with expressions of enthusiasm and a high level of engagement. Key findings include:

- appreciation and support for the Masterplan;
- general consensus that the vision was achievable with collaboration;
- a shared sense of responsibility for looking after the river; and
- acknowledgment from community members there was more that they could do to contribute to the vision.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this report

This document summaries and analyses the community feedback received during the public exhibition of the Parramatta River Masterplan from 18 October – 29 November 2018. It has been prepared by RPS Manidis Roberts.

Background

The PRCG

The Parramatta River Catchment Group, formed in 2008 is an alliance of Local and State Government agencies and the community, working together to make the Parramatta River swimmable again.

Financial members include all 11 councils within the catchment area, Sydney Water, the NSW Environment Protection Authority and NSW Department of Planning and Environment. Associate members (non-financial) of the group include Parramatta Park Trust, Roads and Maritime Services, NSW Department of Primary Industries, Greater Sydney Local Land Services, and the Office of Environment and Heritage.

The PRCG provides an overarching strategic and coordination role for the Parramatta River catchment, primarily focusing on activities where a catchment-wide effort makes more sense and can achieve greater outcomes than each agency working individually.

Key responsibilities of the PRCG include:

- planning and research – driving catchment wide planning and research to make the river swimmable again;
- coordination – coordinating collaboration across organisations to deliver positive outcomes for the river in a more efficient way;
- advocacy – working with partners to spread advocacy and work together to achieve our goals;
- communications and engagement – continuing to build support from the community and stakeholders to connect them to the river and build capacity needed to make it swimmable; and
- monitoring and reporting – working to establish a coordinated monitoring program for swimming in the river.

Our Living River

One of the main initiatives of the group has been 'Our Living River' which was launched in December 2014 and accompanied by the 'We're ready. Are you?' communications campaign. The initiative revolves around the PRCG's vision of making Parramatta River swimmable by 2025. The program has involved considerable stakeholder and community engagement including:

- Parramatta River Catchment Group Full Group
- Parramatta River Masterplan Reference Group
- cross-agency Technical Groups

- surveys
- on site focus groups
- stakeholder workshops
- PRCG community representatives
- popups stalls
- annual Riverfest! Event.

Across these activities over 1100 community members across 11 LGAs have been engaged, expressing their attitudes towards the Parramatta River, behaviours around water, and preferences for swimming activation.

Key engagement documents summarising this engagement include 'Parramatta River Masterplan Community Research' and 'Community Research summary infographic' and are available at www.ourlivingriver.com.au

The PRCG recognises that a swimmable river means more than just swimming and that making the river swimmable again means different things to different people. Through extensive stakeholder and community consultation, the PRCG has identified factors that signify a swimmable river. These include:

- clean, clear water
- quality facilities
- ease of access
- an engaged community
- business opportunities
- healthy Ecosystems.

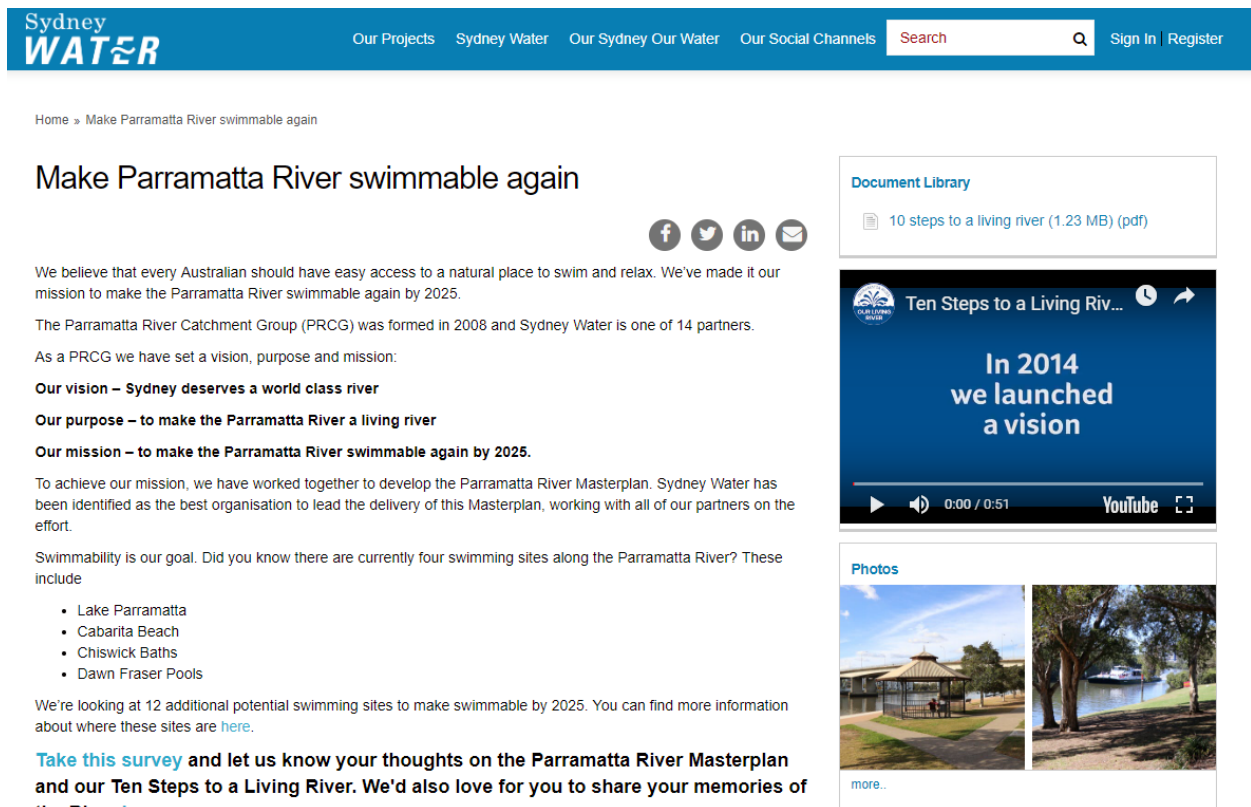
Following extensive technical studies and community and stakeholder engagement, the PRCG developed a draft Masterplan for 'Our Living River' which gives context to the initiative and outlines the practical steps required to achieving the vision of a swimmable river. The Masterplan outlines the ten steps needed to create a swimmable river; 'Ten Steps to a Living River – the Parramatta River Masterplan' is available at <http://www.ourlivingriver.com.au/our-plan/parramatta-river-Masterplan/>

This report focuses on the community feedback received during the public exhibition of the Masterplan, these were received through an online survey.

METHODOLOGY

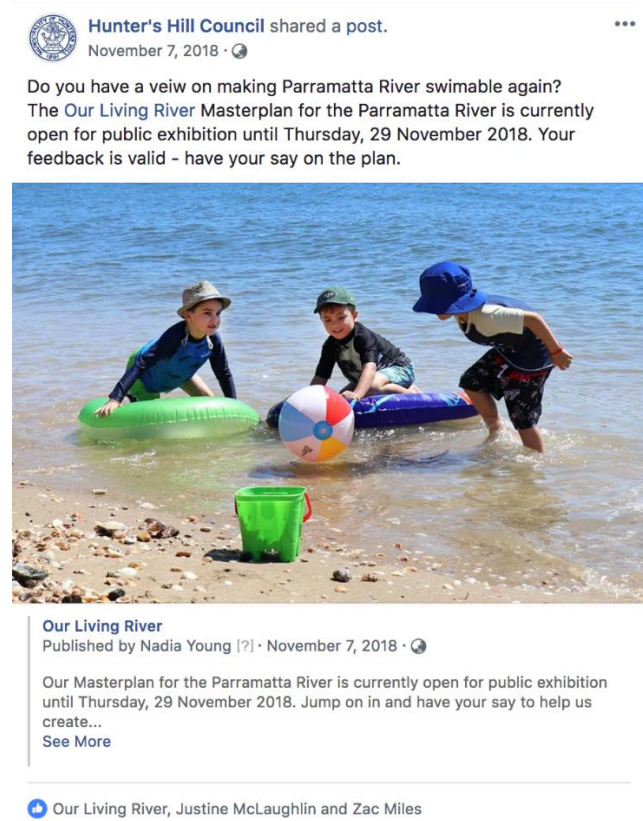
The draft Masterplan was on public exhibition from 18 October to 29 November 2018 and was accompanied by an online survey. There were 194 responses to the online survey and seven formal submissions made during the public exhibition period. All seven formal submissions made were made by Councils. For the 1.9 million people living in the 11 Council areas, it is important to note that 194 participants is a relatively small sample size.

The draft Masterplan was accompanied by a short introductory video which provided background to the Masterplan project hosted at ourlivingriver.com.au. It was promoted via the PRCG's Twitter, Facebook and bi-monthly newsletter. It was also hosted on the Sydney Water Talk website and the websites of Burwood, City of Canada Bay, Hunters Hill, Inner West and City of Parramatta Councils and promoted on their social media platforms. Screen grabs of website hosting and social media posts are displayed below.



The screenshot shows the Sydney Water Talk website. The header includes the Sydney Water logo and navigation links: Our Projects, Sydney Water, Our Sydney Our Water, Our Social Channels, Search, Sign In, and Register. The main heading is "Make Parramatta River swimmable again". Below the heading are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Email. The text on the page states: "We believe that every Australian should have easy access to a natural place to swim and relax. We've made it our mission to make the Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025." It also mentions that the Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG) was formed in 2008 and Sydney Water is one of 14 partners. The vision, purpose, and mission are listed: "Our vision – Sydney deserves a world class river", "Our purpose – to make the Parramatta River a living river", and "Our mission – to make the Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025." A list of current swimming sites is provided: Lake Parramatta, Cabarita Beach, Chiswick Baths, and Dawn Fraser Pools. A link is provided to "Take this survey" and "Share your memories of the River here." On the right side, there is a "Document Library" section with a link to "10 steps to a living river (1.23 MB) (pdf)". Below that is a video player showing a video titled "Ten Steps to a Living River" with the text "In 2014 we launched a vision". At the bottom right, there is a "Photos" section with two images of the river and a "more.." link.

Figure 1 Draft Masterplan and online survey hosted on Sydney Water Talk



Figures 2, 3 Burwood Council and Hunters Hill Council social media posts

The survey

The 19-question survey aimed to:

- understand attitudes towards the river and swimming in the river;
- sense check support and gather feedback on the ten step Masterplan; and
- understand behaviours that community might adopt to help achieve the vision.

Participants were also asked for basic demographic information including postcode, age and household makeup. At the end of the survey, participants had the opportunity to provide a view or personal experience of the Parramatta River and were able to subscribe to updates on the progress of the plan. A copy of the full survey is available in Appendix A. It is important to note that respondents were not required to answer all questions, which means there are some discrepancies in the response numbers between each question.

OUTCOMES

Key findings

In general, the responses to the survey were very positive about the Masterplan with expressions of enthusiasm and a high rate of engagement. Response rates for each question were broadly over 80% apart from some demographic questions and the open-ended question which had lower response rates.

Key findings include:

- Appreciation and support for the Masterplan;
- General consensus that the vision was achievable with collaboration;
- A shared sense of responsibility for looking after the river; and
- Acknowledgment from community members there was more that they could do to contribute to the vision.

Demographic information indicated that most participants lived within 10km of the Parramatta River, most participants were part of a couple either with or without children, 66% of participants were born in Australia and responses came from a fairly even spread of ages.

Detailed findings

It is important to note that not all participants responded to questions about their demographic profile and that this along with the small sample size, does not allow for any conclusions about demographic trends in the responses. Please note that non responses have not been included in the demographic data.

Demographic data

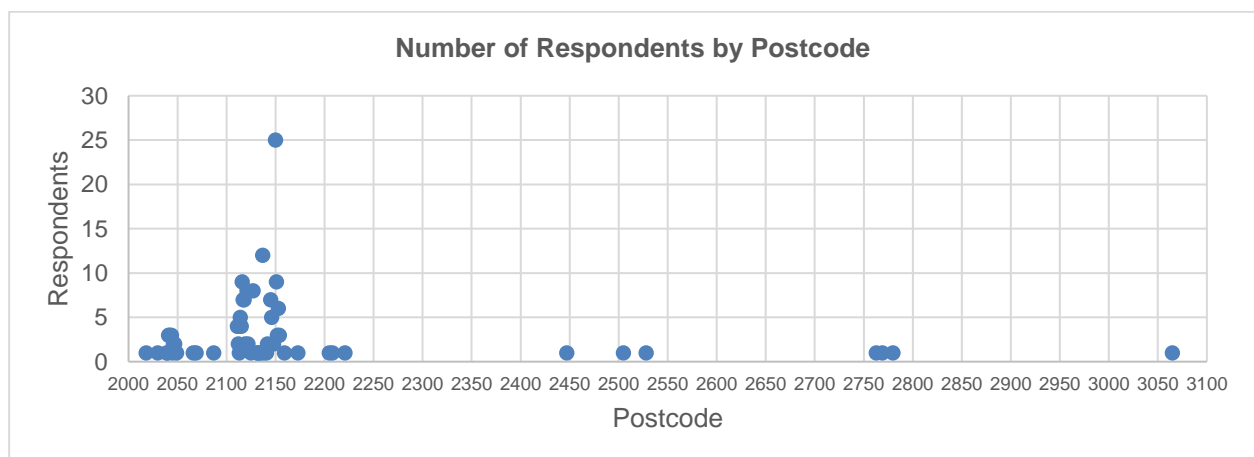


Figure 4 Number of Respondents by Postcode

Most respondents lived in the Parramatta region and surrounds, which include postcodes 2145 and 2154.

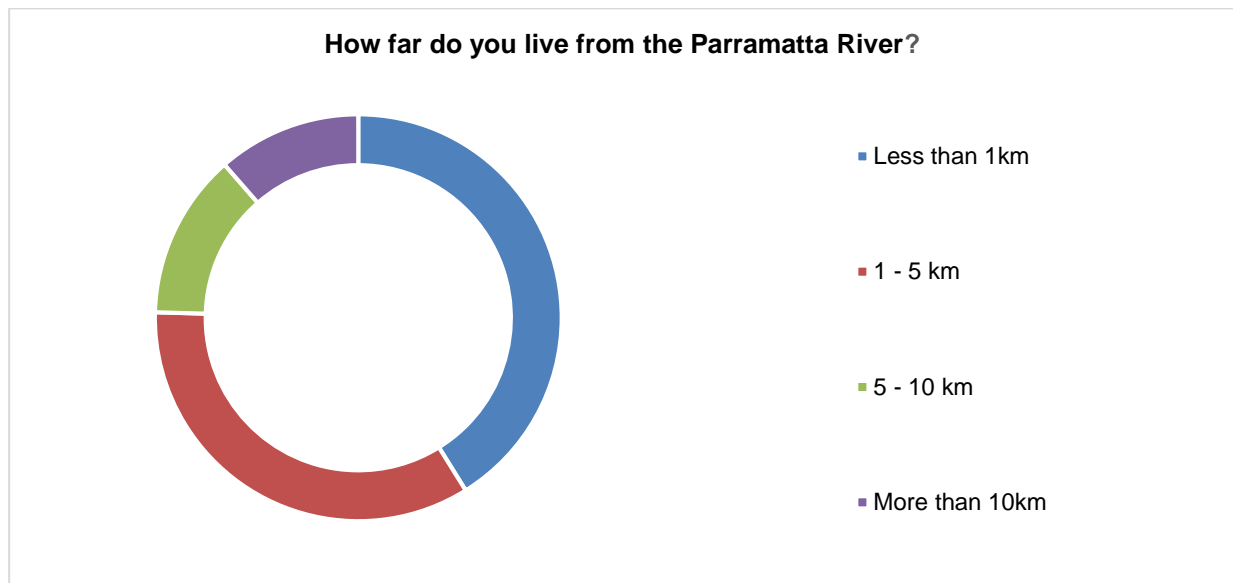


Figure 5 How far do you live from the Parramatta River?

A large majority of respondents lived within 1km of the Parramatta River with almost 90% of respondents living within 10km.

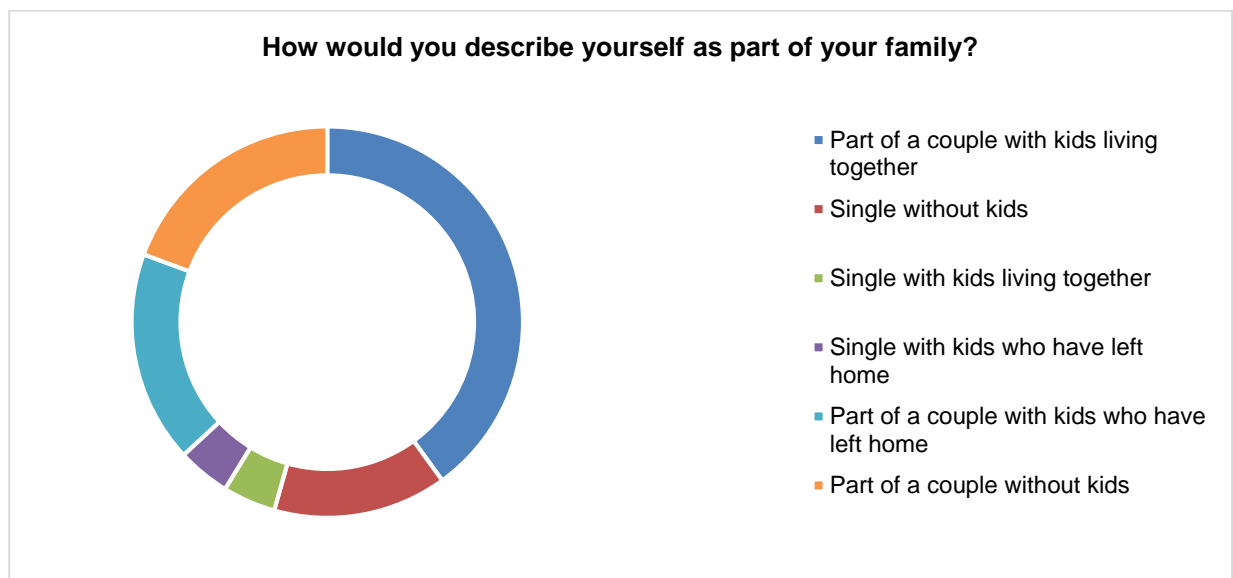


Figure 6 Respondent households

Of the respondents, more than 75% were part of a couple and most of these either had kids who were still at home or who had moved out of home.

Can you please tell me your age group?

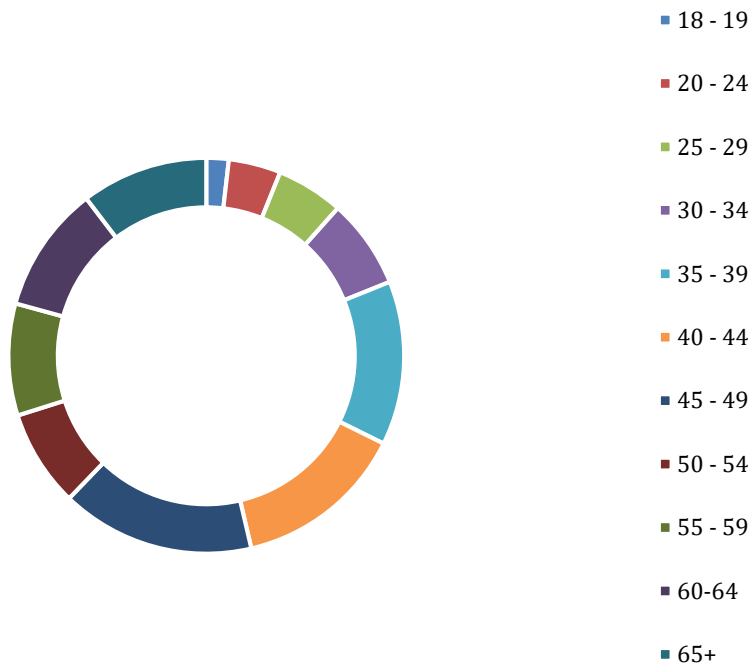


Figure 7 Can you please tell me your age group?

There was a relatively even spread of respondent ages with the largest age group 45-49 years old.

Were you born in Australia, or overseas?

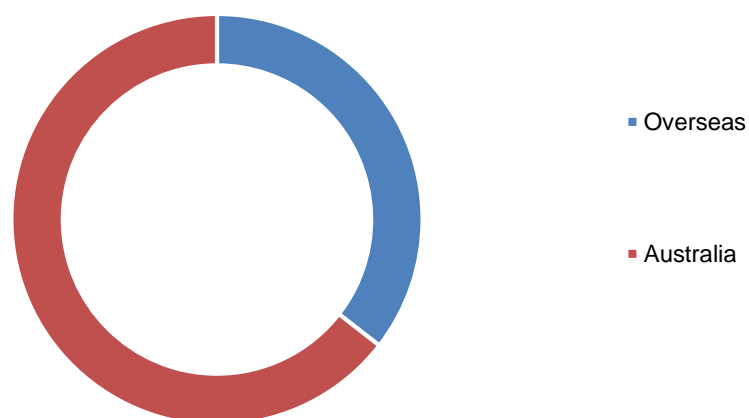


Figure 8 Were you born in Australia, or overseas?

Approximately 66% of respondents were born in Australia with 33% born overseas.

Feedback on Parramatta River and 'Our Living River'

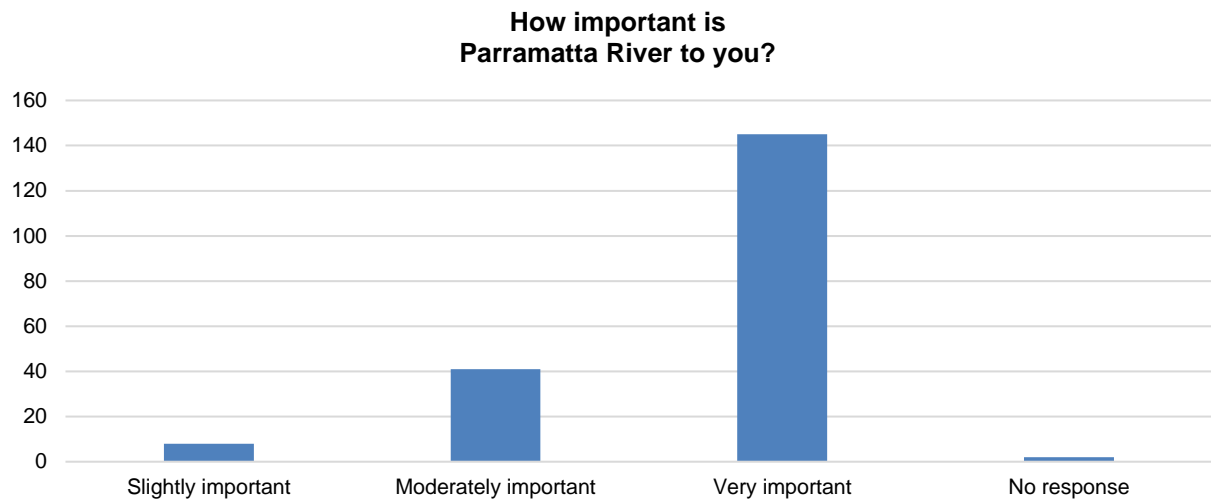


Figure 9 How important is Parramatta River to you?

Parramatta River is important to an overwhelming majority of respondents with most respondents feeling that Parramatta River is very important to them.

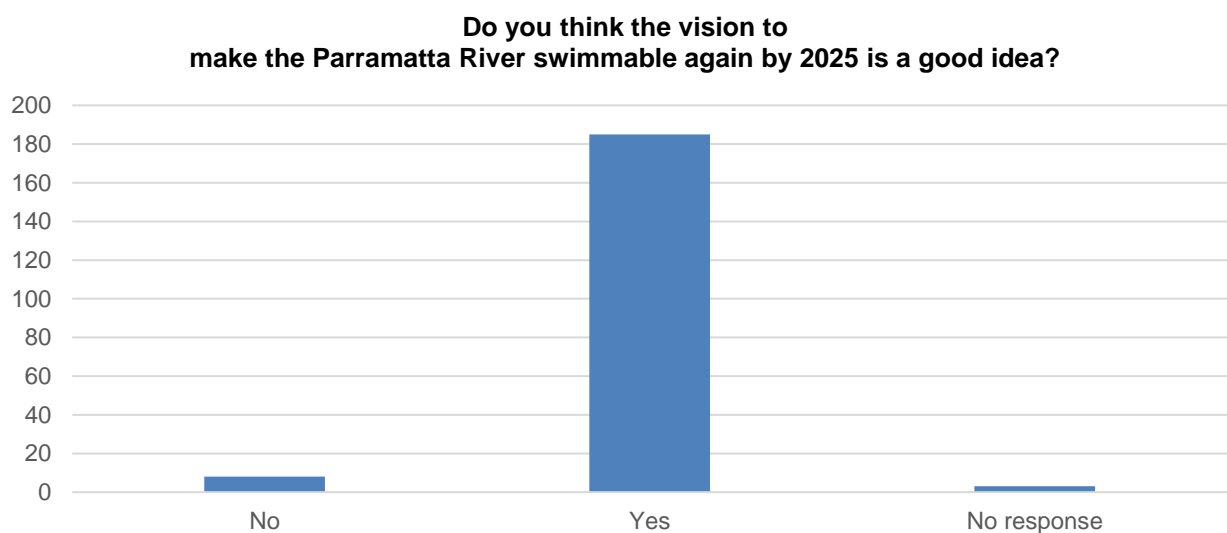


Figure 10 Do you think the vision to make the Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025 is a good idea?

95% of respondents felt that making Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025 is a good idea indicating broad support for the 'Our Living Water' initiative.

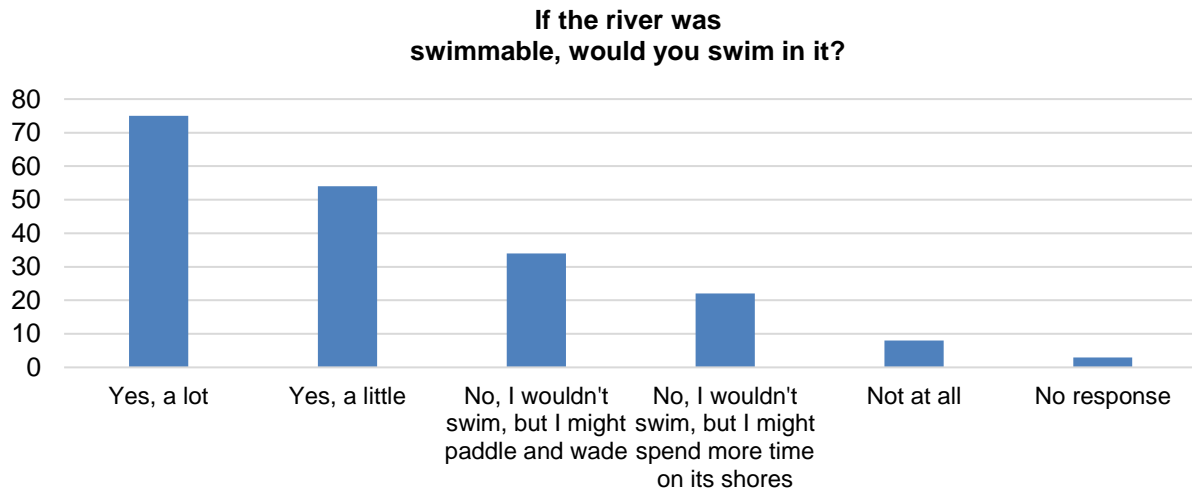


Figure 11 If the river was swimmable, would you swim in it?

The response selected most frequently was 'Yes, a lot' with over 90% of respondents indicating that they would be interacting with the river more.

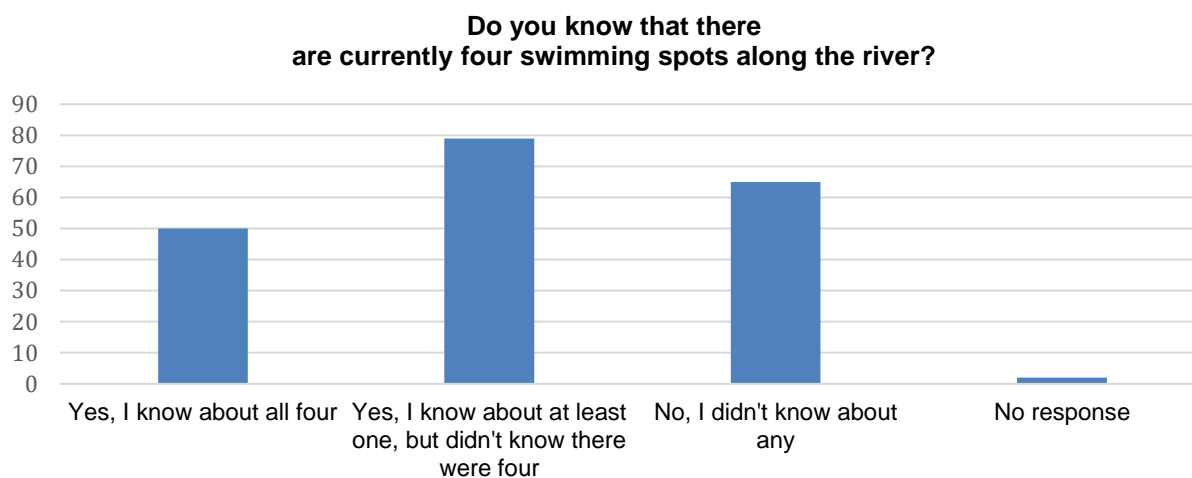


Figure 12 Do you know there are currently four swimming spots along the river?

Approximately 66% of respondents were aware of at least one of the four current swimming spots. However, approximately 33% of respondents were not aware of any of the swimming spots indicating that there may be a need for wider exposure and advertising of the current swimming spots, especially considering the first step of the Masterplan is to 'Get swimming' at the current spots.

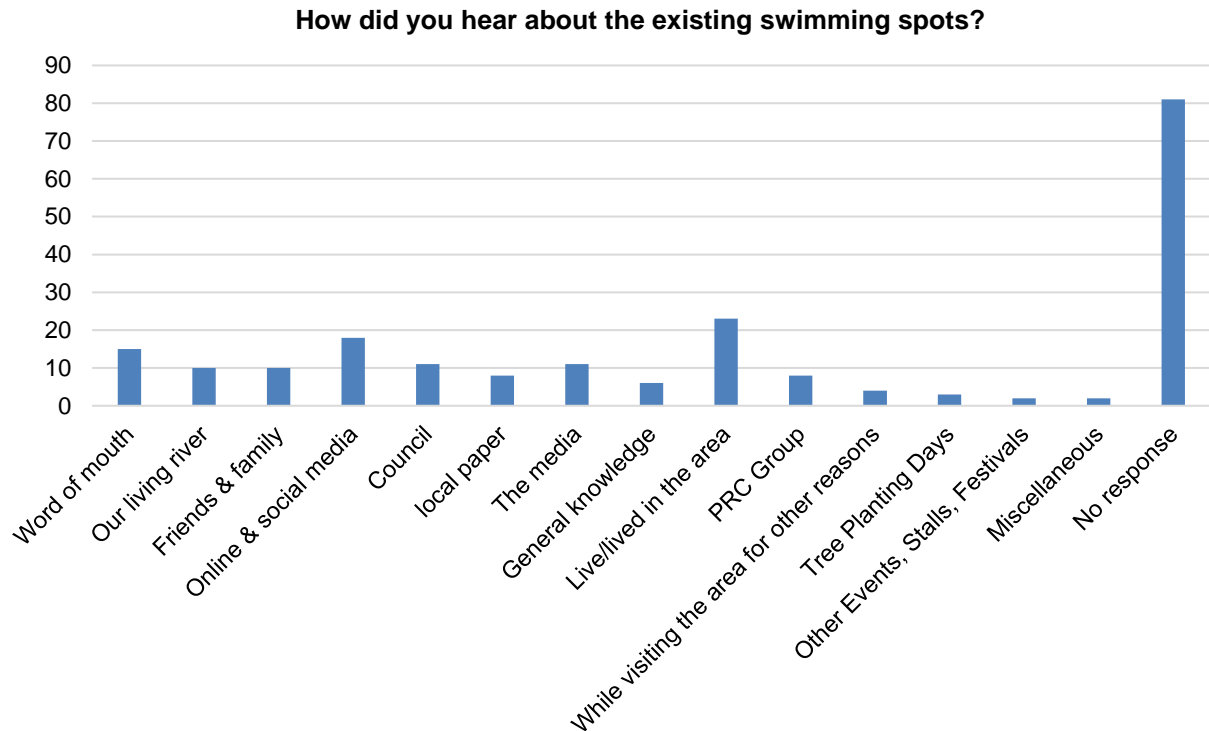


Figure 13 How did you hear about the existing swimming spots?

Approximately half of all respondents did not respond to this question however those who did, had heard of it through various methods, most notably 'Online and social media', 'Living in the area' and 'Word of mouth'. This indicates that the PRCG have had a relatively successful education campaign but that more could be done to generate exposure of the current four swimming spots.

Feedback on the ten steps and draft Masterplan

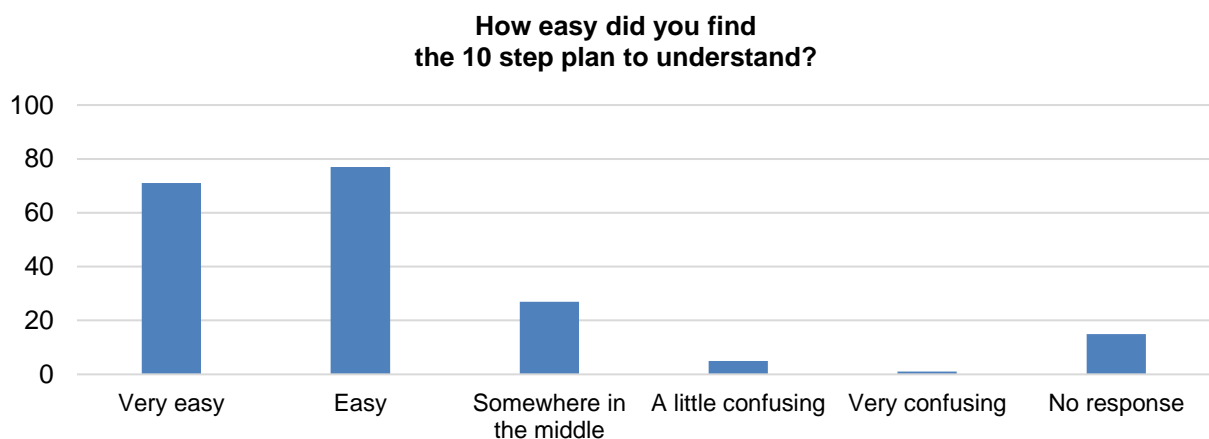


Figure 14 How easy did you find the 10 step plan to understand?

Responses indicate that the 10 step Masterplan was easy to understand with over 80% of responses to this question finding it 'Easy' or 'Very easy'.

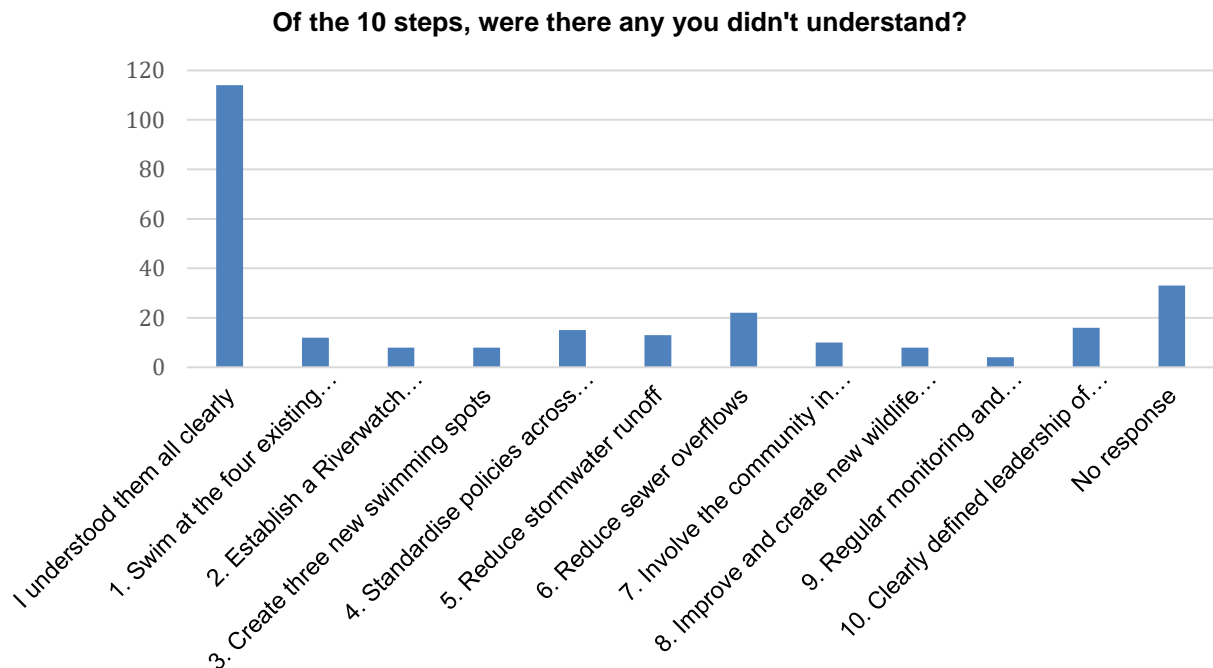


Figure 15 Of the 10 steps, were there any that you didn't understand?

The majority of respondents understood all 10 of the steps clearly although notably, over 20 did not clearly understand 'Reduce sewer overflows. This could be because it is one of the steps that does not directly link to community action, however it highlights that more education in this area could be needed.

Of the 10 steps, which do you feel is most important to making the Parramatta River swimmable again?

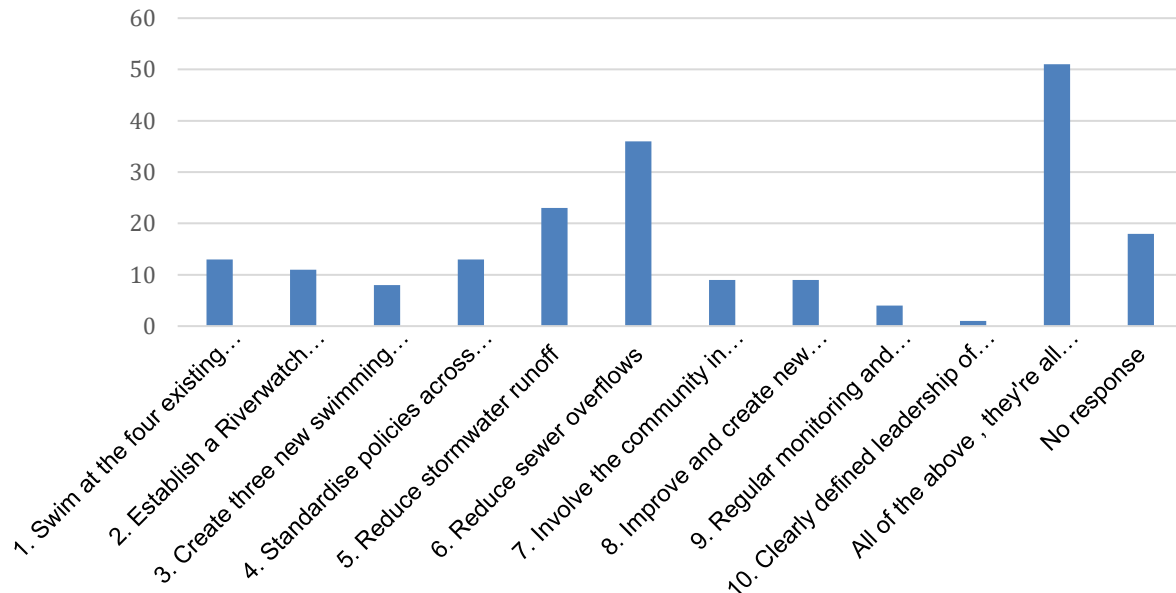


Figure 16 Of the 10 steps, which do you feel is most important to making the Parramatta River swimmable again?

The response selected most commonly amongst respondents was 'All of the above, they're all important!' indicating that there is significant appreciation of all 10 steps. Another response that was of note was higher support for 'Step 6 Reduce sewer overflows' and 'Step 5 Reduce stormwater runoff' indicating that a significant group of respondents felt that improving water quality was an important step in making the river swimmable.

Of the 10 steps, were there any you didn't agree with?

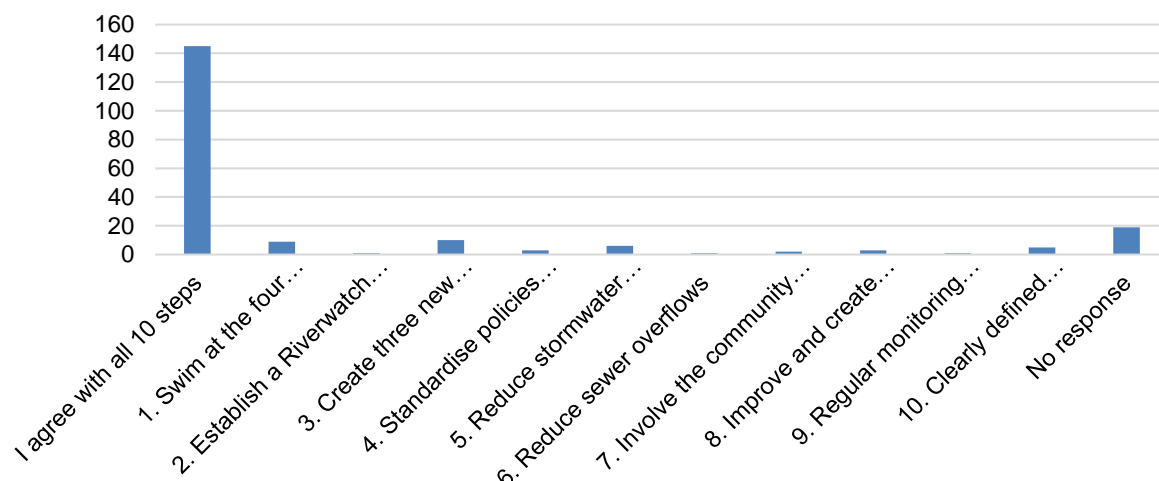


Figure 17 Of the 10 steps, were there any that you didn't agree with?

70% of respondents agreed with all ten steps with a handful of respondents not agreeing with 'Step 1 Swim at the four existing swimming spots' and 'Step 3 Create three new swimming spots'.

Having read the plan, whose responsibility do you feel it is to make the Parramatta River swimmable again?

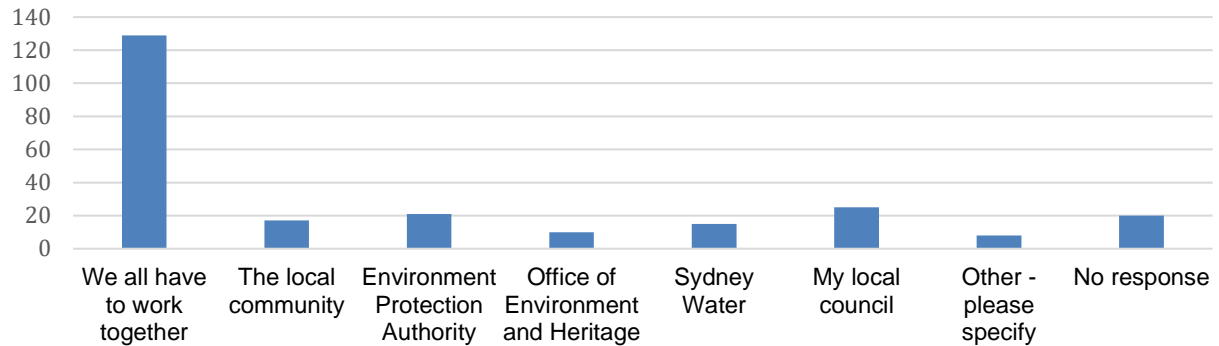


Figure 18 Having read the plan, whose responsibility do you feel it is to make the Parramatta River swimmable again?

A large majority of respondents thought that the vision was something that had to be worked towards collaboratively. 12% of respondents, notably felt that it was Council should be the most responsible.

Of the following, which do you feel you can do to help make the river swimmable again?

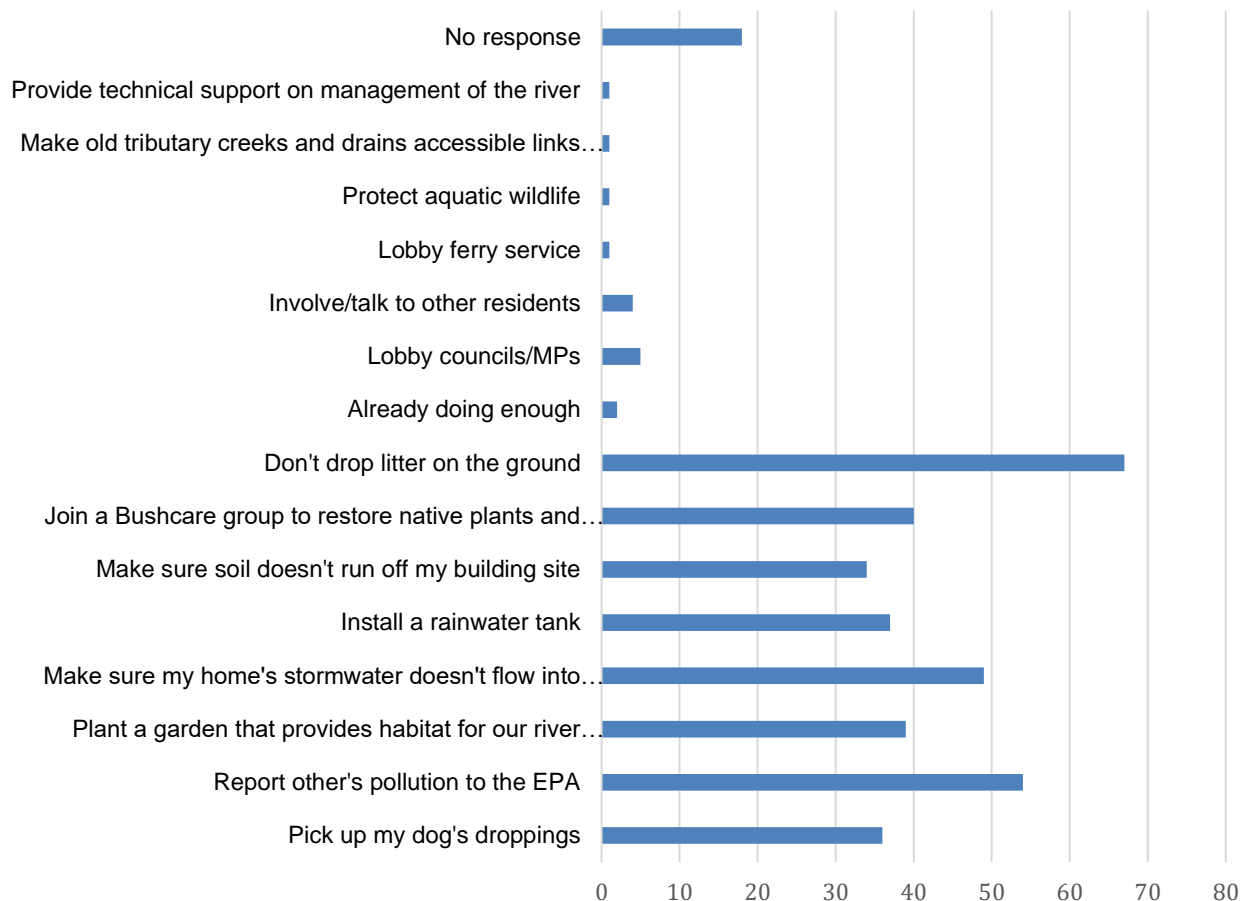


Figure 19 Of the following, which do you feel you can do to help make the river swimmable again?

Respondents felt that there were many things that they could do to help make the river more swimmable. The most common response was 'Don't drop litter on the ground'. Other commonly selected actions included 'Pick up my dog's droppings' and 'Make sure my home's storm water doesn't flow into the sewerage system.'

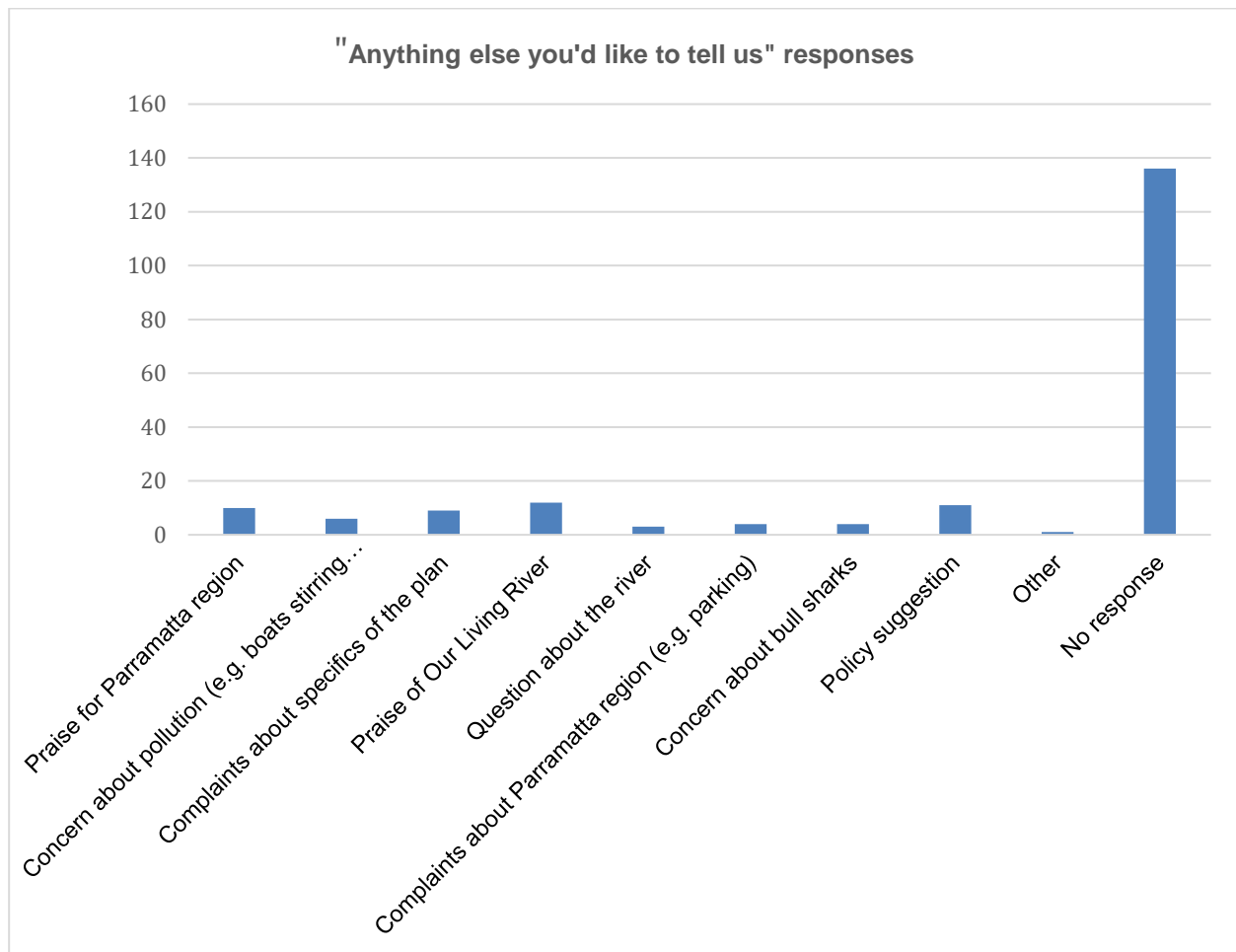


Figure 20

A small portion of respondents gave open ended answers which praised the Parramatta River and region and the Masterplan

Community members expressed enthusiasm towards the collective work toward achieving the vision. A selection of these response are below:

"A lovely place (in parts) to wander and observe wildlife, but....pollution/runoff/litter is a constant source of concern and must be addressed!"

"Regularly go to Parramatta Park and walk along the river so a swim or paddle would be good when hot. I also think it would be a good idea for inclusion of lifeguards in your plan similar to lifeguards at Lake Parramatta"

"The difference that has been made to the river is noticeable. It's great feature of Parramatta to walk along the river and take in the landscape and animals."

"Quite smelly now, hope that improves with the implementation of this plan."

"I swim in Dawn Fraser pool as often as possible and love it. Please keep working on improving the river water quality. It's a wonderful experience to swim in a natural pool and lots healthier than a chlorine pool!"

CONCLUSION

Recommendations

The survey indicated that the draft Masterplan has been well received by the community and that the ten steps are widely supported. An analysis of findings has produced key recommendations which include:

- The high levels of community support demonstrate the success of the stakeholder and community engagement to date. This engagement is evidenced in the ten steps of the Masterplan and shows the PRCG's approach to engagement is working and should be replicated in the future.
- The first step towards making Parramatta swimmable again is 'Get swimming' a step that requires community awareness about the existing swimming spots. The findings of this survey indicate that 75% of respondents weren't aware of all four swimming spots and that 34% weren't aware of any. An education campaign by the PRCG and associated agencies is recommended to increase awareness of the swimming spots.
- It is very positive that 70% of respondents understood the ten steps however 30% had difficulty understanding one or more of the steps. It is key that all stakeholders and community members have a clear appreciation of the ten steps therefore continued community education on the ten steps is recommended. This could include a video or simple fact sheet on the PRCG website and associate partner's websites.
- The respondents were enthusiastic about how they could take action to support a swimmable river. The PRCG could take note of which actions have the highest impact and lowest community awareness, such as making sure soil doesn't run off their building site and continue to focus community communications on raising awareness of them and the actions community members can take.

Conclusion

The PRCG has developed a highly informed draft Masterplan to achieve their vision of making Parramatta River swimmable again. The public exhibition period of the draft Masterplan received good interest from the community with social media promotion from the PRCG, Councils and Sydney Water. The online survey has indicated that there is significant support for the Masterplan with agreement on the achievability of the vision, the importance of a collaborative approach and an uptake of behaviours that would contribute to making the Parramatta River swimmable again.

Appendix A – Survey questions

**LET'S MAKE OUR RIVER
SWIMMABLE AGAIN BY
2025**

Jump on in! Have your say on the Draft Parramatta River Masterplan and help create a swimmable river by 2025.

The Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG) is an alliance of councils, government agencies and community groups who, through the *Our Living River* initiative, are working together to make the Parramatta River and its tributaries into living waterways, so we can all benefit from what they have to offer.

We have developed **Ten Steps to a Living River** that form the basis of the Parramatta River Masterplan, to be launched in October 2018.

The Masterplan sets out our agreed actions to make the Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025, which has been designed based on scientific studies and community consultation.

Development of the Masterplan has involved the community at every stage. We are currently seeking feedback on the ten steps to a living river to check if we're on the right track.

Please help us by completing this survey.

Your assistance will help us achieve our vision of creating a living Parramatta River that offers a number of accessible, safe and attractive places to swim and enjoy.

Click on 'Next' to get started.

[Back](#)[Next](#)

How important is Parramatta River to you?

Very important

Moderately important

Slightly important

Not at all important

Back

Next

Do you think the vision to make the Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025 is a good idea?

Yes

No

Back

Next

If the river was swimmable, would you swim in it?

Yes, a lot

Yes, a little

No, I wouldn't swim, but I might paddle and wade

No, I wouldn't swim, but I might spend more time on its shores

Not at all

Back

Next

Do you know that there are currently four swimming spots along the river?

Yes, I know about all four

Yes, I know about at least one, but didn't know there were four

No, I didn't know about any

Back

Next

How did you hear about the existing swimming spots?

[Back](#)[Next](#)

The image below outlines our 10 steps to a living river. Please take a look at the 10 steps, and click 'Next' when you are ready to move to the next screen.

If you cannot see the image, just click 'Next' and there is a text version of the 10 steps.



Back

Next

Below are our 10 steps to a living river (as shown on the previous page). Please take a look at the 10 steps, and click 'Next' when you are ready to move to the next screen.

Ten steps to a living river

1. Get swimming

Right now there are four places you can swim in the river. The more we swim in them, the more others will join us and community support will grow. And the more we can learn what makes a swimming place great, and what people want out of future swimming spots.

2. Keep watch

A Riverwatch water monitoring program will help us measure change over time, protect existing swimming spots, open new swimming sites and understand what makes water quality change over time.

3. Create new swimming spots

Our goal is to create three new swimming spots by 2025. Doing this means working out all potential options, then choosing the best three based on feasibility, vulnerability and desirability. We've already looked at 12 potential new spots and proposed different ways of using each, based on scientific assessment and community input.

4. Standardise the standards

The Parramatta River's catchment spans 11 local council areas. To create a swimmable river, we need to work together to standardise policies and practices that impact water quality, such as approaches to baseline measurements, installation of rainwater tanks, creation of rain gardens and so on.

5. Reduce stormwater runoff

Stormwater runoff – and all the rubbish and other pollution it brings with it – is one of the number one ways our river gets dirty. A catchment-wide approach to reducing this stormwater through water sensitive design, which absorbs rain where it lands, will improve water quality.

6. Improve overflows

Sydney's sewer system is over 100 years old, and was built for a smaller city. So, when it rains, stormwater can flow into and overload the wastewater system, causing it to overflow into our creeks and rivers. Understanding where, when and how this happens and putting measures in place to stop it, is an essential part of making our river swimmable again.

7. Involve the community

In the most part, stormwater pollution comes from street runoff. And that is determined by the actions of the community living in the catchment area. Good management of building sites, picking up your dog's droppings and not littering are just three ways community can help create a swimmable river. Helping people understand this link is a key to success.

8. Bring in nature

A living river needs people, fish, birds, bats, frogs, turtles, grasses, trees and many more to be a complete ecosystem. By maintaining and improving habitats for our iconic species – especially our five mascots – we can bring nature back to the river. Doing so means understanding current habitat health, establishing foreshore improvement programs and calling on citizen scientists to help track progress.

9. Report back regularly

Regular monitoring and reporting not only shows us if we're winning, it helps keep our river in the mind of everyone involved and reminds them that this is a long-term project that is worth investing in.

10. Create clear leadership

A big project needs clear leadership. The plan to make the river swimmable again is sponsored by 11 councils and three state government agencies and supported by many more. It also draws on community collaboration and Aboriginal wisdom to bring a big mix of experience and opinions to the table. Sydney Water has been identified as the best organisation to lead this alliance, via a defined governance structure that sets and delivers on clear targets.

[Back](#)[Next](#)

How easy did you find the 10 step plan to understand?

Very easy

Easy

Somewhere in the middle

A little confusing

Very confusing

Back

Next

Of the 10 steps, were there any you didn't understand?

Please tick all that apply

1. Swim at the four existing swimming sites and make them better

2. Establish a Riverwatch monitoring program

3. Create three new swimming spots

4. Standardise policies across councils

5. Reduce stormwater runoff

6. Reduce sewer overflows

7. Involve the community in making the river swimmable

8. Improve and create new wildlife habitat

9. Regular monitoring and reporting on progress of the plan

10. Clearly defined leadership of the plan

I understood them all clearly

Back

Next

Did the 10 step plan make you feel confident that it is possible to make more parts of the Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025?

Yes, very confident

Yes, quite confident

Somewhere in the middle

Still not that confident

Not at all confident

Back

Next

Of the 10 steps, which do you feel is most important to making the Parramatta River swimmable again?

Please select one.

1. Swim at the four existing swimming sites and make them better

2. Establish a Riverwatch monitoring program

3. Create three new swimming spots

4. Standardise policies across councils

5. Reduce stormwater runoff

6. Reduce sewer overflows

7. Involve the community in making the river swimmable

8. Improve and create new wildlife habitat

9. Regular monitoring and reporting on progress of the plan

10. Clearly defined leadership of the plan

All of the above – they're all important!

Back

Next

Of the 10 steps, were there any you didn't agree with?

Please tick all that apply

1. Swim at the four existing swimming sites and make them better

2. Establish a Riverwatch monitoring program

3. Create three new swimming spots

4. Standardise policies across councils

5. Reduce stormwater runoff

6. Reduce sewer overflows

7. Involve the community in making the river swimmable

8. Improve and create new wildlife habitat

9. Regular monitoring and reporting on progress of the plan

10. Clearly defined leadership of the plan

I agree with all 10 steps

Back

Next

Having read the plan, whose responsibility do you feel it is to make the Parramatta River swimmable again?

Please tick all that apply

My local council
Sydney Water
The local community
Environment Protection Authority
Office of Environment and Heritage
Other - please specify
We all have to work together

[Back](#)[Next](#)

Of the following, which do you feel you can do to help make the river swimmable again?

Please tick all that apply

Pick up my dog's droppings

Report other's pollution to the EPA

Plant a garden that provides habitat for our River mascots [Our River mascots are the long necked turtle, striped marsh frog, bar-tailed godwit, powerful owl and southern myotis (microbat)]

Make sure my home's stormwater doesn't flow into the sewerage system

Install a rainwater tank

Make sure soil doesn't run off my building site

Join a Bushcare group to restore native plants and homes for native wildlife

Don't drop litter on the ground

Other suggestions

Back

Next

Would you like to be informed about the progress of the plan?

Yes

No

Back

Next

What is your residence postcode?

Back

Next

How far do you live from the Parramatta River?

Less than 1km

1 - 5 km

5 - 10 km

More than 10km

Back

Next

How would you describe yourself as part of your family?

Part of a couple with kids living together

Part of a couple with kids who have left home

Part of a couple without kids

Single with kids living together

Single with kids who have left home

Single without kids

Prefer not to answer

Back

Next

Can you please tell me if you are aged between...?

18 - 19

20 - 24

25 - 29

30 - 34

35 - 39

40 - 44

45 - 49

50 - 54

55 - 59

60-64

65+

Prefer not to answer

Back

Next

Were you born in Australia or were you born overseas?

Australia

Overseas

Prefer not to answer

Back

Next

Thank you very much for your help!

Before you go, is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your views or experience on the Parramatta River?

We'd love to hear your stories about memorable times enjoyed at the river.

Once you are finished, please click on 'Next' to finish the survey.

[Back](#)[Next](#)